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THE ANGELS
OF GOD

HUNTER

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SUBJECTS—IX.

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By JOHN HUNTER, D.D.

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The Angels of God.

“He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.”—PSALM XCI. 11, 12.

ANGELS may only be the creatures of the devout imagination, yet they are to be found in almost every religion, in the oldest poetry, and in the finest devotional literature of the world. Like Melchizedek, they have no earthly parentage that can be traced. The belief in them came originally, not out of temples, schools, and books, but out of nature and communion with nature, out of long and manifold contact with the marvel and mystery of the world, and much brooding and musing on the facts and forces of human life. In the poetry of all nations we find some traces of this heavenly vision,

some gleams of white wings amid the clouds and darkness round about man and his life. The universe in which Hebrew patriarchs and prophets and the first Christian disciples lived and moved was full of angels. We can as easily think of summer without flowers as of the Bible without angels. They are bound up with that poetic and religious interpretation of life which we find everywhere in the pages of the Old and New Testaments.

There is much that is lovely and pathetic, much deep and beautiful meaning in this fundamental persuasion of humanity, and little that is in itself unbelievable. While we need not think of protecting and ministering angels as we see them in pictures—delicate and sexless creatures, with wings and chubby faces, and large, dreamy eyes—there is, on the other hand, as little need to thrust aside this ancient and almost universal

belief in races or orders of celestial beings working silently and invisibly, like the hidden forces of nature, and keeping sleepless watch around the path of man's life upon this earth, as a belief that does violence to reason, or puts a strain upon faith. A belief may be all the more true because it appeals to and satisfies the imagination. The imaginative or poetic interpretation of life must not be confounded with the fanciful or false. It is a superficial realism that rejects what it cannot see and touch. What we call our scientific and critical methods are not the only ways of approaching things. There is far more in the universe than is ever clear to the vulgar or merely critical eye. There is no essential antagonism between the scientific and the poetic or religious conception of the world, but it must not be forgotten that the scientific view of things is only one view. There are other and deeper aspects,

and the failure to perceive and appreciate these may be largely due, not so much to superior intelligence as to spiritual defect—to the inactivity or paralysis of the spiritual imagination. Not only through observation and analysis, but through imagination and feeling and experience; not only through the head, but through the heart comes the great revealing and the light of life by which we walk. We must not allow our new studies and new knowledge to rob us of the vision of the world as it lies in the imagination, and is present to faith, or to turn our attention away from those powers of spiritual perception which to-day, as yesterday, are the Divinest possession of our humanity and require the largest care and the severest culture. The ideal may be, after all, the most real, and insight the highest, as it is the rarest, form of sight. We are working toward new and finer conceptions and expressions of the

central confidence of religion in the livingness and beneficence of the universe, but as yet there is no call to cast discredit upon the way in which our fathers expressed their thought and trust. It is one of the supreme offices of religion to idealise the world and life; and a lovelier, more illuminating, more inspiring, more consoling vision and interpretation of their ministries than this of angels, or one more satisfying to the poetic and religious feelings, it is impossible to find.

The Biblical doctrine of angels has reference not only to celestial beings whose existence cannot be proved nor disproved, but it includes all the agencies, seen and unseen, which play a part in the protection and development of human life, all the influences which guard and shape and minister to human good. Wind and fire, storm and pestilence, are spoken of as the angels or messengers of

God. We find the word applied in the Old Testament to the prophets, and in the New Testament to the leaders and teachers of the early Church. Let us not put the angels too far off. What are they but our daily helpers? Nature, beauty, art, knowledge, love, joy, hardship, grief, death—are all angels, which, with faces open or veiled, may help us toward God. The subject of our meditation, then, is this larger and more practical one—the ministries of life, the powers and persons and things that are actually at work in and around our days, fulfilling the Divine purpose concerning us, caring for us with a real care and keeping us in all our ways.

1. *The Forces, Laws and Varied Influences of Nature are Angels of God.*

We must use symbols, and this

symbolism of angels is as true as any we can find, and as helpful for conceiving and describing those natural powers and splendours which form the environment of our life. It not only invests mighty and mysterious forces, and all natural laws and processes with a living glory, but it gives us a view of things which quickens and deepens confidence in a universe essentially good and making for goodness. Not only through her sweet, serene and gracious things, but through all her severities of discipline nature is beneficent, or making for beneficence. Interpreted in any little and literal way, the beautiful assurances and promises of the psalm from which our text is taken do not cover the facts of human life. We see every day that the good man is not protected from poison and pestilence, from cyclones and tidal waves, any more than the ungodly man; that how-

ever trustful and submissive, he is not protected from many of the physical evils of existence, and that amid storm and fire he is not borne up in angels' hands in any way that prevents suffering and death. And yet, notwithstanding all the dark and terrible aspects of life, we feel that our trusts are truer than our fears, our confidence more in accord with universal and eternal fact than our suspicion and scepticism, and that in some large and comprehensive way these ancient words of faith and hope are true, and must be true. The real significance of things lies in their purpose and interpretation. Disentangled from what is partial, and read in the light of the chief end of man's existence in this world, namely, the development of his higher life, these old sentences have a meaning, and a deeper meaning than can be seen on the surface. We must seek their truth, not in single and solitary occur-

rences and experiences, not in facts isolated from the whole of which they are a part, not in what we may see here or there at any one moment, but in the gradual development of the meaning and final outcome of the great drama. We must seek their truth, not in what are called special providences or interventions on the part of Deity, but in the conception of a God who not only transcends, but resides in and acts through all the energies and forces which we see and know to be working in and upon the world of nature and man, and who in the fulfilment of His purposes is content with long and slow processes reaching through centuries and ages. The essential and vital thing in the ninety-first Psalm is confidence in God, confidence in His ways of working, confidence in the beneficence of His operations, confidence that the dark and painful things which beset the righteous man can do

him no real harm, cannot touch the life in him which is life indeed, confidence in God's ultimate protection and blessedness, that when man seems to fall, he falls into everlasting arms.

What a universe is this in which we are living our little life! How vast and awful its forces and movements, and how entirely beyond our control! Why are we not afraid? It is because we have learned that God is not outside His world; that what we call nature is pervaded with wise and beneficent purpose; that in all this universe there is nought but good; that a living Will, that is also a good Will to every man is the Eternal Source and Guide of the forces which play about our life, and that these are so ordered and directed that they train and protect the children of men, like angels which have charge over us to keep us in all our ways.

The laws of nature have often

been called merciless and cruel because they are fixed; but in a world designed for purposes of discipline and for the common good of a whole race the invariability of law is not cruelty, but kindness—the outward and visible sign and proof of the goodness that is without variableness or the shadow of a turning. We should suffer far more from disease, storm, and pestilence if special providences were our supreme reliance. Well may Robert Browning sing—

I have gone the whole round of creation,
I report as a man may of God's work,
All's love, yet all's law.

The forces and laws of nature, pitiless though they sometimes appear, are yet our friends and teachers. When we put ourselves in line with them they serve us like angels, yield us all their strength, and bear us up in their hands. The conditions of our life

with nature are in many respects hard, but wisely and mercifully so. We are here to be educated. Out of man's tragic struggle with nature civilisation has grown. Accidents, disasters, calamities have helped to develop the noblest qualities of our humanity. The severities of the universe are the severities of love, after all—the heavenly Father training His earthly children. The Hebrew poet was right when he spoke of winds and flaming fires as angels of the most High. O blessed soul, that has such a sublime confidence!

But the ministry of nature is not all of a severe character. It is often gentle and bright, ministering by means of its bounty and beauty to human growth, human culture, human joy. What angels of healing hide in the sunbeams! What vital forces reside in air and water! What gracious work they do in building up and nourishing

our life! There is a deep truth in Landor's line—

We are what suns and winds and water
make us.

When we muse on the enrichment and enlargement of life, the strength and peace which have come from the sights and sounds of the natural world, from dawn and sunset, from shining noonday heavens and the mystery of night, from deep woods, rushing rivers, far-spreading lakes and great seas, from the beauty of the hills and the majesty of the high mountains, how else can we think of these natural influences but as angels of God charged to bless us and keep us in all our ways.

2. *The Angels of Love and Friendship.*

But turn now from nature to man, and think what angels of God our fellow-beings are to us. Helpful human beings are the chief

instruments of the eternal Goodness and Care. They are none the less angels because they are clothed with flesh and blood, have features often rugged, and are not quite free from the failings of humanity. In the Gospels we read that angels ministered unto Jesus, but the little children who brightened a dark and troubled hour of His mortal day, and the women who gave Him their love, the service of their hands, their precious ointment, their tears, were as truly angels in His sorrowful and lonely life as those which, we are told, found Him wandering in the wilderness and fainting in the garden. We speak of earthly and heavenly, human and Divine love, as if all true love were not heavenly and Divine! In human love and care we see the Divine love and care. Many a poor soul to whom the Eternal Goodness was a mere abstraction has found in the love of fatherhood, or mother-

- hood, or wifehood, or sisterhood, the messenger and revelation of the heavenly love, the mediator and interpreter of the Divine charity. Love in man's heart or woman's heart comes from God, and leads back to God. In Raphael's great masterpiece, the "Sistine Madonna," in the Dresden gallery, we see, clothed in almost spiritual tints, the angel aspect of motherhood. What may be so helpful, so full of moral protection and inspiration as a mother's love? And how full a true and noble friendship is of the highest helpfulness! how it protects against passing weakness and discouragement and keeps one loyal to what is best! Its influence always tends to idealise life. "You were an angel to me," wrote Carlyle to Emerson, "and absorbed in the beautifullest manner all thunderclouds in the depths of your immeasurable ether." "Our friends," Emerson himself said,

“are those who make us do what we can.”

How often have little children been to men and women as angels of God, softening their hardness, protecting and strengthening the good in their natures, and restraining and destroying the evil! Very beautiful are the words with which George Eliot closes one of the chapters in “*Silas Marner*.”

“In the olden days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the city of destruction. We see no white-winged angels now; but yet men are led away from threatening destruction—a hand is put into theirs, which leads them forth gently toward a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward, and the hand may be a little child’s.”

Every man has his guardian angel. It may be a parent whose love never faints; it may be a wife who bravely bears and hides the

infirmities and sins of her husband ; it may be a little child that softens the heart growing hard in the struggle of life ; it may be a sister moving in thoughtful and self-denying ways around a careless brother, and whose love outlasts many an affection that seems for a time more ardent ; it may be a noble and faithful friend that keeps one true to his better self ; it may be the constant example of a good man, who carries wherever he goes the atmosphere of a higher world ; it may be a poet, a prophet, a teacher whose words inspire faith and kindle hope. Angels every one, protecting, directing, strengthening, inspiring us, bearing us up in their hands, and leading and keeping us in the beautiful ways of God ! Angels, alas ! we often only see and know them to be when the clouds are receiving them out of our mortal sight for ever.

And what are our dead, what the memories they leave behind,

what their spiritual influence, but a part of the ministry of life; angels of God who protect us from evil and stimulate us to do good, deliver us from ignoble moods, keep us true to high ideals and aims, a safeguard and inspiration in hours of critical strain and trial? Death has, indeed, its gracious compensations. How it hallows life! Our heavenly friends, from what may they not save us, and to what may they not urge and lead us?

Hand in hand with angels,
Through the world we go;
Brighter eyes are on us
Than we blind ones know.

3. *The Angels of Daily Duty and Discipline.*

What a good angel is work—the daily task from whose pressure we cannot escape! What low thinking is that which calls labour a ‘degradation!’ It may sometimes take the form of rude and grinding toil, but even then it has a blessing in

it. It is an angel of God, even though it may be clad in mean and rough garments. Goethe saves his fallen Faust through honest and hard work, and at every step it makes him nobler and better. Prayer is a vital necessity of all deep and earnest life, but work is as needful as prayer, simply as a means of moral protection. It is an angel of God, not only by what it guards us from, but by what it leads us to. It is a potent means of education, and the secret source of much of the energy and wisdom and goodness which bless the world. Often, too, the best help and comfort that can be found in sorrow is found in the daily duty, in doing what has to be done. It saves one from many morbid thoughts and cravings, and from the isolation and selfishness of grief.

4. *The Angel of Trial and Death.*

Shall we call pain and grief, disappointment, bereavement, loss,

failure, the penalties of wrongdoing, sickness and death, angels of God? Why not? We cannot, of course, put them among the angelic band if comfort and ease be regarded as the ideal and end of life. But if strength and fortitude, submission and patience, wisdom and sympathy be the greatest blessings of life and its crown of rejoicing, then we must call our sorrowful experiences angels of God, part of a beneficent and Divine ministry. Not only the fair and gracious things which sweeten and gladden our days, but the calamities which sweep away our happiness, the winds which break our hopes, the storms which smite our hearts and empty our lives are the messengers which fulfil God's word, and have received a charge concerning us to bear us up in their hands, lest we grow superficial and light-minded, worldly and proud. In our path through life much hath been

grievous to flesh and blood, and
doubtless much shall still be——
but what then?

Who is the angel that cometh?

Pain!

Let us arise and go forth to greet him;

Not in vain

Is the summons come for us to meet
him;

He will stay

And darken our sun;

He will stay

A desolate night, a weary day.

Since in that shadow our work is done,

And in that shadow our crowns are won,

Let us say still, while his bitter chalice

Slowly into our hearts is poured,—

Blessed is he that cometh

In the name of the Lord.

A life unvisited by the angel of
sorrow is apt to be a life without
thought, a life without pathos, a
life without depth, a hollow and
petty life, a hard and fruitless
life. Let us meet our sorrow
when it comes in the right
spirit, and not as spoiled children,
and it will work for our good,
and we shall win from it a

blessing. It is the paradox of Christianity that out of poverty we are made rich, out of weakness we are made strong, that we lose to gain, and die to live.

And what are the penalties that follow our transgressions? When men truly understand what moral law means and moral life, they will also understand that the sternest penalties of their wrongdoing, and not the things which ward them off, are the angels of God.

So by our woes to be,
Nearer, O God, to Thee.

And what about Death? We have called it by many hard names—the Great Destroyer, the King of Terrors, and such like. One does not like to think of the fear which in the popular mind is associated with death. It is due to ignorance and superstition, or to the effeminacy which is born of the soft indulgences of life.

Let us look for the angel-aspects

of death, for they are many. To one who believes in Eternal Goodness at the heart of things, it must be unquestionable that whatever is inevitable and universal must also be beneficent. When we look at nature we find that the things which are common are all good; and death when it comes, not prematurely, but naturally, is no exception to the rule. It is chiefly by the survivors the pain and sorrow of it are felt. Even when the transition seems violent, it is not so violent as it seems to the onlooker. When shall we give to this angel of God the name which Jesus gave it? When shall we be able to use in a real, and not in a mechanical and conventional way the great words struck out in the first exultation of the Christian faith—Death is abolished! Death is swallowed up by Victory!

Who is the angel that cometh?

Death!

But do not shudder and do not fear;

He comes to help and to save and to
 heal,
Blessed is he that cometh
In the name of the Lord.

5. *The Angels of Inspiration.*

Let us not overlook among the celestial ministries what may be called the angels of inspiration—the inspiration which created our Sacred Scriptures, and which fills our minds and souls to-day with heavenly visions and voices. What are our serious impressions and profound convictions, what our gleams of insight, what our touches of finer feeling, what our nobler impulses, what our longings and aspirations, what those formless visions that sometimes illuminate our days, what those unvoiced words which we have heard again and again amid the silence of the hills, under the midnight stars, by the wayside of quiet meditation, in moments of trial when we have been deeply moved? What are

they all but the visitations of the living God? The old Hebrew would have described them as the angels of God coming to him, and the angels of God speaking to him. Heaven and God are not farther away from us than they were from the patriarchs and apostles. The stories of open heavens, of descending and ascending angels, of spiritual voices, and suchlike, are not merely the records of an ancient, but vanished experience. We too are God's children. We too are susceptible to spiritual impressions because we ourselves are spirits. The days of inspiration are not over. The Angels of God are ever with us. They haunt us at every turning. Do not be indifferent to their presence! Do not think them absent because you cannot catch the expression of their face, or trace the outlines of their form. The spiritual presences are the most real presences. Let not the ministries of life and death, of

the visible and invisible world be
lost upon you. In God's good
Name, I plead with you to welcome
the heavenly messengers.

Around your lifetime golden ladder
 rise ;
And up and down the skies
With winged sandals shod
The angels come and go, the messengers
 of God.

Our Sources of Refreshment and Renewal.

“He shall drink of the brook in the way;
therefore shall he lift up the head.”

PSALM CX. 7.

TRADITION has ascribed this psalm to David, but it is, perhaps, better understood when we read it as the production of one of David's devoted followers. To treat it as one of the Messianic psalms, and believe that it finds a certain true and large fulfilment in Jesus Christ, we are not required to ignore or deny its basis of contemporary fact. The higher reaches of the human imagination are ever full of prophecy, and no prophecy of Scripture, we are told, is of private or particular interpretation.

In the latter part of the psalm

the king is represented as engaged in conflict. At a wayside stream he quenches his thirst, and is thus enabled with revived ardour to continue the pursuit of the enemy. "He shall drink of the brook in the way ; therefore shall he lift up the head." In the olden days of warfare and trouble what a thing of beauty and blessing was the brook by the way ! And to-day, as yesterday, it is a true and lovely symbol of all those influences, natural and spiritual, which refresh and renew the inner life.

In this strange pilgrimage that we call human life what traveller does not sigh now and again, for the brook by the way ? The great human necessities are not confined to any condition or time, yet it would seem that never, as now, was there such need of the influences which refresh and restore. How restless and intense our life ! How killing the pace ! How constant and keen the conflict ! How many

temptations to forget the early dream and inspiration, and to let the fine power and ardour of youth waste away into vulgar prudence! How soon we begin to mourn over the fading of enthusiasm, even in the best work, and the loss of freshness of spirit in dealing with the duties involved in the manifold relations of life. How much there is around us, not only to quicken thought, but to dissipate it; not only to arouse energy, but to exhaust it! There are special seasons also of strain and trial, when zest and zeal pass away, and duty wears the forbidding look of drudgery, and we walk slowly and wearily where once we marched swiftly and full of hope.

Brooks by the way! The heart asks for them, and the God in whom we trust, the Shepherd of our pilgrimage, has placed them within our reach. The wilderness of our discipline is not a dry and waste howling one. It has its Elims, as

well as its Marahs, its green pastures and quiet waters, as well as its valleys of the shadow of death. How they abound, these springs and streams of refreshment, these good and gracious influences which take the fever and fret out of the heart, restore the soul, renew the beauty and joy of life, and make us feel in every part of our being the healing touch of the Infinite Strength and Peace!

(1) In one of his letters, Nathaniel Hawthorne speaks about bathing himself in "the refreshing waters of solitude and open-air nature," and there is no season of the year in which we may not find this source of rest and refreshment for the mind and heart. The Creation may always be our recreation. To be in love with this beautiful world is to be at the secret source of many a noble pleasure. To have a mind and heart open to the highest impressions of the natural universe, to be able to enter into the

life of a summer or winter day, to enjoy a night of stars, to feel the beauty of a flower, the grandeur of a storm, the spell of the wide waters or the high mountains is to have abundant means of recovery and renewal always nigh at hand whenever we feel the need of calling ourselves off for awhile from the excitement and strain of the daily conflict. It is true, nature does not yield the sympathy which the passionate human heart requires, but insensibly she helps her lovers to bear their burdens and to find rest in God. We are quickened and comforted by outward things more than we know. The sun and moon and stars, unaffected by our little controversies, rebuke and soothe us as we gaze on their tranquil glory. The mountains bring peace, and our fretfulness is carried away by the rushing river at our feet. Not only in the synagogue did Jesus find refreshment, but in the lilies of the field, in the

sunset sky, among the hills, and by the lake of Galilee. In his suggestive journal, Amiel, describing a country walk taken when a dark and troubled mood was upon him, thus writes: "The sunlight, the green leaves, the sky, all whispered to me, 'Be of good cheer and courage, poor wounded one!'" We are all at times poor wounded ones, needing all the refreshment and healing we can find. And,

What simple joys from simple sources
spring!

The quiet ministry of nature, the play of natural influences upon us, may be full of renewing grace. Beyond the satisfaction of taste and sentiment, this experience which we call contact and communion with nature may be a gain to the whole spiritual being; soothing and relieving mental pain, quickening a more hopeful spirit, nourishing all finer feelings, and,

like every deep human experience, taking the soul into the presence of the Eternal.

Let us make the most and the best of this source of refreshment and renewal. We are sent into the world, not only to solve its problems, fight its battles, and put away its sin by the sacrifice of ourselves, but to find joy and rest; and through rest and joy, the deepening and enlargement of our life. There is a religious as well as an irreligious worldliness. "All things are yours, . . . the world . . . and things present."

(2) In the familiar saying of Herder, in his last illness: "Give me a great thought, that I may refresh myself with it," we find the suggestion of a second source of refreshment and renewal. We have at our constant command the greatest thought, the highest wisdom, the finest feeling of the teachers and leaders of mankind. The world's best literature abounds

with thoughts that are full of pure refreshment and healing life. If the supreme test of inspiration be the power to inspire, then, how many inspiring books it is, or may be, our privilege to know—books which transfigure the world to our thought, give a noble and divine interpretation to life, furnish the mind with new interests, refresh and renew the heart, and are an open road to the purest and most enduring of earthly enjoyments. The joy which Longfellow said he found in the sympathetic study of Dante is within reach of all. Almost any day and hour we may leave the hot and dusty highway and the field of contention for the peace and freshness of some great book that ministers to all that is best in us. Why should life be the dry and thirsty land it is to so many, when all around us in shining garments stand the poets and prophets of God, waiting to lead us to fountains of living waters?

(3) In the first book of Samuel we read, "When the evil spirit was upon Saul, David took an harp and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well." Not only literature, but all true and noble art may be an influence that soothes the healthy, as well as the sick and morbid mind, and be, not only the opiate, which, alas! it too often is, that induces a base forgetfulness, but a pure and blessed source of refreshment to earnest souls. What wonderful power music and song, eloquence and painting, have always had to move the souls of men! By ministering to the higher nature they reinforce mind and body, and by quickening the spiritual imagination remand much of what would otherwise disquiet and dishearten to its own obscurity and insignificance. There is no more desirable a thing than a good hobby. The violin and organ, for instance, have been to many a

brook in the way that has refreshed and nourished an ideal life.

(4) Let a sentence from George Macdonald point out another river of the water of life at which we may often drink and be refreshed: "To know a man who can be trusted will do more for one's moral nature than all the books of divinity that were ever written." The beauty of the outward world is full of divine help, but there is more beauty and more inspiration in living excellence than in the fairest natural scenes. Wonderfully refreshing is the heart's speech of the truly wise and good, but more beneficent is the brave thought when it becomes the brave deed, and more life-giving the Divine Word when it is made flesh and dwells among us. How rich the quickening and renewing influences which come from the presence and example of men who lift clearly before us the nobler ideals of life; from the memory of

the faithful dead; and from the biographic page—

Bright affluent spirits, breathing but to
bless,
Whose presence cheers men's eyes and
warms their hearts,
Whose lavish goodness this old world
renews,
Like the free sunshine and the liberal air.

Blessed beyond all price is the friendship that stimulates us to do our best, that is potent to dispel morbid broodings, to cheer and brighten life, and that helps us even by its unconscious influence to look at things in a larger and better way. And here we find the truest use of the study of biography. Every good and faithful life with which we become acquainted is a positive addition to our moral power, to those influences which in days of depression, when stupor creeps over us and weariness, revive hope and arouse energy.

(5) The wise and religious

culture of the home affections will disclose many brooks by the way, full of the very water of life that flows from the throne and heart of God. When the Heavenly Father ordained that we should live in families, He placed within our reach sources of happiness and strength that from age to age have been as springs in the desert. It is in the home we must seek to cherish and renew our best life. We are far from having exhausted its possibilities. We lose much that is refreshing indeed if we neglect to cultivate its quiet and simple pleasures. The late John Richard Green wrote, just before his death—"What seems to me to grow fairer as life goes by is the love and tenderness of it, the laughter of little children, and the simple talk by the fireside."

(6) "What do we live for, if not to make life less difficult for each other?" is a saying of George Eliot's that indicates

another pure and unfailing source of refreshment and renewal. Sympathy gives us new interests. It is impossible to feel life dull and vacant if we fill it with unselfish cares and helpful activities. We must have our share of the sorrow and bitterness of life, and grow familiar with the pain of sacrifice. It is a discipline we cannot spare, if we would be perfect. But in our darkest and most depressed hours there is always one source of comfort nigh at hand—we can do something for others. There may be seasons when we cannot find help for ourselves, but there is no season when we cannot give help. And this giving of help will, in due time, bring its reward. Soon shall we prove, in our own experience, the truth of the Saviour's word, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

(7) "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of

the tabernacles of the Most High." We must seek, as our fathers did, the perennial springs of refreshment that are to be found in the private and public ordinances of religion. The excitements and exhaustions of modern life make this duty even more imperative. Industry and enterprise are good; but life is not only action, it is thought and feeling also. We do ourselves the greatest wrong, if we allow our activities to crowd meditation and prayer out of our days and to rob us of the secret of rest in God. To have depth and elevation and tranquillity in life, and the aim kept high and the impulse true and steady, it is absolutely necessary for mind and heart to have constant access to the Source of inspiration. It is a moral calamity to lose the meditative and worshipful spirit. Reverence, faith, and aspiration are the springs of noble and fruitful living. Sunday and the Church

stand for our highest life. They invite us to drink of waters that rise from cool and unpolluted depths. They offer an opportunity of finding that truest rest and recreation which come through mental and spiritual quickening and uplifting, and of verifying the word of prophecy, "They who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength."

(8) "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." This invitation, so large and sweet and tender, and which needs to be made clear and impressive to each succeeding generation, is an invitation to seek refreshment and renewal through trust and obedience. In the fellowship of Jesus Christ we lose our ignorant and guilty fears, and our selfish and vexing cares; we find a heavenly Father, we learn to take a gracious view

of life, even of its hardest circumstances, and to be at peace with things; we come to love the will of God, and to rejoice in the good of others as if it were our own; we enter into the Saviour's sense of immortality, and are persuaded that in the body and out of the body we are compassed about by the atmosphere of Infinite Love. What can refresh the weary heart and life like the spiritual persuasions, the great trusts and hopes which are the secret of Jesus, and which He communicates to all who put themselves under His influence, and seek to live in the communion of His Spirit? How the words spoken more than nineteen centuries ago near Jacob's well interpret our spiritual experience to-day! "Whosoever drinketh of the water I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life."

Belief and Life.

“ Lord, I believe ; help Thou mine unbelief.”
ST. MARK IX. 24.

THE state of mind which the Evangelist Mark ascribes to the father of the lunatic child is not uncommon. His broken confession and appeal, “ Lord, I believe ; help Thou mine unbelief,” indicate the condition of many. They believe, and they do not believe.

Light half-believers of our casual creeds,
Who never deeply felt, nor clearly
willed,
Whose insight never has borne fruit in
deeds.

To realise the meaning of truths
we do not doubt, and, perhaps,
never dream of doubting ; to think
more deeply what we think ; to
feel more deeply what we feel ; to
have a real and living belief in the

high and solemn things we say we believe—this is what nearly all of us, brought up in Christian homes and churches, most need.

The temptations to scepticism and unbelief which approach men through the inquiring and critical intellect assail only the few. And in the life, sensitive and loyal to pure moral ideals, they will not long weaken and hinder. The just live by faith, and can find no abiding satisfaction in negation or doubt. The obedient spirit will not be left to wander in darkness; the servant faithful over a few things will not miss at last the joy of the Lord; and to the pure in heart will be given, as of old, that vision of God which is the crown of life.

But we must be cheated by mere words, names and professions, if we fail to see that the unbelief which assails the vast mass of men and women is not intellectual, and cannot be removed by any intellectual process. What we have most

to fear in these, as in all days, is a faith not alive, or only half alive; a belief that is not a spiritual conviction and experience, that is not taken into the heart, and therefore never works any change in affection and motive, in character and life. Belief and life, etymologists tell us, spring from the same root. Of this we may be sure, that we never truly believe anything until such a belief produces its natural result in the life. There is no true believing when we profess one thing and live and act in a contrary way. To believe truly is to live truly, and the faith that justifies and saves contains "the promise and potency" of all righteousness. Men often measure their belief, not by its quality, nor by its power over them, but by the number of articles to which they give their assent. It is a word-faith, not a heart-faith. Now a belief in many things is of little or no value, if it is only faint and

formal belief. Strength and beauty and fruitfulness of life depend, not on how many things we believe, but on how much we believe in anything. Our supreme need is, not more articles of belief, but more real believing of what we say we believe.

(1) "I believe in God." What a majestic affirmation that is, and how much it comprehends! It is a confession which touches the beginning and the end of human faith. It is the first and the last word of religion. Jesus Christ lived and died to bring us to God, and His work and joy will be fulfilled when God is all in all to His children.

How often we say, "I believe in God!" How easily the sentence falls from the lips! But it is one thing to say it, and another thing to live as one who feels God to be the Alone and Everlasting Reality of human life. "I believe in God." Yes, but with what sort of a

belief? "Thou believest there is one God," writes St. James with solemn sarcasm; "thou doest well; the devils also believe," Mr. Froude says of Sir Robert Cecil that he believed in God in "a commonplace kind of way." When a man says, "I believe in God," the question is, What is the quality of his belief and what its influence? Does he hold the belief, or does the belief also hold him? The selfish man who has lost all sense of the eternal necessity for truth and righteousness of life, says, "I believe in God," but his belief is not worth anything. In his business and intercourse with men he lives "without God;" he is ruled and guided, not by the Divine will, but by passion, pride, pleasure, self-interest.

Atheism of thought need not trouble us much. Few persons entertain it with serious consistency. "Man," says the poet, "cannot be God's outlaw, even if

he would." We cannot guard our unbelief. All the deeper movements and experiences of life are constantly forcing us out of it. The atheism we have most to fear is something infinitely more subtle and dangerous than any theory or definition, however negative, of the mystery of the universe. The worst atheism is practical, not theoretical. It is atheism of feeling and atheism of conduct—feeling and acting as if there were no God, no Eternal Righteousness, no Eternal Love; as if the relations of life had no divine order, and the events of life no divine significance. He is not altogether "without God," who is loyal to his ideal of the highest and best. "To do justice and judgment, is not this to know Me? saith the Lord." But there is no such atheist as the man who sneers in his heart when he is reminded of principle and duty; who allows selfish passions to obscure and distort his

moral vision, and to whom in daily life private gain or pleasure is more than aught besides. Much conventional belief in God must be as little pleasing to Him as unbelief. It is unbelief. To act as if it were safer at any time to do wrong than right, to follow lies than truth—that is the worst way of denying God. It is not possible for us to believe truly in “God the Father Almighty,” and yet not be different in behaviour and spirit in every relation and experience of life from what we would be if we did not believe in God. To believe truly in God is to believe in the things which constitute the character and will of God. To believe in God is to believe in truth, righteousness, mercy, and love, as principles to be carried out to the utmost extent, and to be trusted and followed in the direst extremity. To believe in God is to maintain the trustful and hopeful temper amid all the troubles of

life, because the experiences of these passing days lie under the shadow of the Great White Throne, and are part of the heavenly Father's education of His children. It may not be required of us to put our faith into words, but if it is a real and living faith in God it will be known and read of men in the righteousness, the unselfishness, the charity, the faithfulness, the hopefulness, the divine beauty of the life.

(2) We believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God. It is the meaning of the Christian revelation that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself; that being infinite in love and sympathy He bears on His heart the sorrow and sin of mankind, and that Christ reveals Him bearing them—reveals the Eternal Passion and Sacrifice. In Christ the Divine Goodness is not only taught, but incarnate. God in Christ is, in truth, Christianity. How few realise this

belief ! The average religious man is more Pagan than Christian in his conception of the Divine character and ways. We say we believe in the Deity of Jesus Christ, but do we not miss altogether and fail to realise the vital spiritual truth of the doctrine when we think of the Invisible God as having dispositions toward His creatures and His children that are not Christ-like ; when we think that God can be less or other than that which the Son reveals Him to be, less than infinite in His compassion and helpfulness, other than the Everlasting Father and Saviour of men ? "The love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord" is the heart of the Christian Gospel. Do we believe it ? It is true that the presence and spirit of Christ in human life quicken and deepen the sense of sin, but it is also true that in the circle of Christ's influence and in His fellowship, the liveliest and deepest sense of sin

can never lead to despair. The man who truly believes in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, believes in redeeming mercy and grace; he is delivered from the fear which weakens and the despair which kills; dark regrets and forebodings are no longer his companions, the gloom and anguish and dread have gone out of his soul; he is more than conqueror, "through Him that loved us," over all the shadows and spectres of evil which once pursued and vexed him.

But Jesus Christ is also the realisation and revelation of the Divine ideal of our human righteousness and the manifestation of its possibility to our doubting souls. He stands for a distinct order of character and life. In Him we know man to be the Son of God and the brother of His fellow-man. To believe in Him is to believe in ourselves. He is ourselves in prophecy and anticipation; the type and promise of

the perfection possible to every one of us. "I believe in Christ," we say; but what is the belief worth in the way of the great endeavour to be conformed to the image of His holy living and dying? We must not imagine we are truly believing in Him if we are allowing a spirit that is the foe of His spirit to move and rule us, and to hinder us, perhaps, from even trying to obey the heavenly vision. To believe in Christ is to be set free from selfish passions; it is to be filled with His enthusiasm for the will of God and the service of mankind, with the spirit of His obedience unto death and the charity of His Cross. Has the Lord and Saviour of men any such believers, any such companions in His filial devotion and sacrifice? Good Christians we think ourselves to be, but do we follow Christ?

(3.) We believe in the Holy Spirit; believe that there is a Spirit of truth and holiness and

love, and that this Spirit is God's Spirit and is present in our nature and life. We believe this, and yet we do not allow our belief to produce its proper result. We do not surrender ourselves to the guidance of the Spirit, and strive with our might to bring our inward and outward life into conformity, that the one may not put the other to a secret or open shame. We allow vulgar passion and desire to subdue and silence the Divine pleading within us. Day after day we follow our selfish inclinations and refuse to be led by the Holy Spirit of God.

“Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

It is easy to repeat this ancient confession of faith, but are we living in the reality of that which we acknowledge to be true? It is easy to repeat phrases and to quote texts. It is easy to imagine that we are “in the faith,” because we think this and that about the faith. The confession God wants

is that of the heart and life, and all other confession is only good as it is a means to this end. To believe truly in the Father is to be living as faithful children; to believe truly in the Son is to be arming ourselves with the same mind; and to believe truly in the Spirit is to be obedient in word and deed to our heavenly visions and persuasions.

Not only from heresy and false doctrine, but from make-believe belief and from all barren and dead faith, we must ever pray God to deliver us. Lord, we believe! believe in the great revealing moments of existence, when the spells of custom and the world are broken, and we stand nearest Thee; but when we tread again the common levels of life, and are tempted to forget, yea, to deny the heavenly vision and voice, Help Thou our unbelief.

The Power to be Quiet.

“UNQUIETNESS,” says an old writer, “is the greatest evil that can come into the soul except sin.” The truth and force of this remark will be seen when we consider a few of the blessings which depend on the power to be quiet.

(1) Consider how much we lose of the beauty of the world when our hearts are full of the unrest which selfish desire and striving generate. Without the tranquil mind it is almost impossible to enjoy nature, and quite impossible to hear its pensive undertones. The flowers, and hills, and stars, the running brooks, and the winds among the trees tell us little, if anything, of their secrets when we are disquieting ourselves in vain. We must be quiet to get

the best impressions from this universe of sights and sounds.

(2) Consider how much we lose of what is gracious, beautiful, and helpful in our human relations, because we carry about with us an unquiet mind, a heart seldom or never

At leisure from itself
To soothe and sympathise.

Our restless and selfish moods, tempers, and habits diminish our sensitiveness to the poetry and pathos of human life, take from us the gift of appreciation, and leave us with little power to respond to the sweet and gentle sanctities of home and friendship.

(3) Consider how much we lose of ourselves, how we fail to come into true and complete possession of ourselves, because we have so little of the power to be quiet. The literary sense, one of the masters of literature tells us, perishes for want of repose, and

the same might be said of even finer and more precious gifts—the gifts which make of men great prophets and great saints. Alas! for all that God gives and man loses.

(4) The power to be quiet has its intellectual value. It is necessary to clear, deep, and strong thinking. The mind must be quiet to get the best work out of itself, and to be able to penetrate or grasp clearly any subject. Vexed by vulgar desires or irritated by slights, it cannot secure that concentration of power which is so essential to clearness and directness of vision. To think to any good purpose it is not enough even to be alone; we must have the power to be quiet when we are alone—the power, that is, to hold the mind calmly and steadily to its work above all the strife and tumult of the lower life.

(5) The power to be quiet has its ethical as well as its purely intellectual value. To be able to

answer in moments of critical trial the vital question, "What is the right thing to do? what is my duty?" we must be able to separate ourselves from the excitement and urgent pleading of private desire and interest, and from the tyranny of worldly idea and custom, from the convention which often takes the place of conscience. The clear vision only comes to the calm heart—the heart free from wrong feeling and selfish affection. It is the placid lake that reflects the mountains and the blue skies, and, when the night comes down, the everlasting stars. So it is in the quiet soul the lights of the moral heavens reflect themselves.

(6) To receive the deepest religious impressions, to have the great truths of religion as a real and vital possession, we must have the power to be quiet. The eternal voices are not heard when the world and passion are speaking, and we are troubled about many

things. The visions of the seer and mystic ask for discipline and quietude. It is the calm, brooding spirit that has given us the prophets of the East and the West. The quiet and contemplative mind shares the blessing of the pure in heart who see God. "Be still and know." "When I was silent I heard a voice." It is in stillness and silence, when mind and heart and soul are fully awake but calm, that we are most conscious of the One Presence.

In secret silence of the mind
My heaven and there my God I find.

Many of us find it hard to believe what we would fain believe, and much of our religion is a dim and doubtful tradition, just because we have lost the power to be quiet. Out of life and experience come the great revealings. "What does it matter," as George Fox once said to Cromwell, "that we have the Scriptures if we have lost

the Spirit that wrote them?" We cannot expect the unseen things to be supreme and commanding realities to us if they are never allowed to get sole and undisturbed possession of our feeling and thought, and if all those secret and subtle ways are closed by which the Silent Spirit approaches the heart.

(7) The power to be quiet is power for worship. It is essential to prayer, and to the receiving of the full benefit of our gathering together from time to time for the social rites of religion. The best things do not force themselves unbidden upon us; we must be prepared to receive them, prepared to meet our God. It would change some of our familiar forms of speech if we realised how possible it is that when we are complacently dismissing a religious service as "dull," we may in that judgment be passing sentence upon ourselves, and be

condemning our own unserious and unthoughtful moods and habits.

(8) The power to be quiet is the condition of all noble and fruitful activity. To be busy does not always mean to be fruitful. Many so-called busy men, both in the world and in the Church, are painfully barren and uninteresting, and their bustling activities add little to the sum of human good. Industry, enterprise, and zeal are not everything. The contemplative side of life has its pressing claims. True and sound progress in almost every sphere depends, equally alike, on action and thought. To be practical does not mean to be shallow. What we do depends ultimately upon what we are. Without the power to be quiet our work must suffer in quality, and become woefully superficial and defective.

(9) Amid the care and strife of our common life how much we need the power to be quiet! It

is pitiful to be at the mercy of things which are but the incidents of a brief and passing day. To be strong and brave we must have root in ourselves. To get out of life a Divine education we must have the quiet and well-balanced mind which in prosperity keeps us humble and in adversity patient. The power to be quiet means power to suffer and be strong, power to compel losses to yield us some moral gain, and out of temporal defeat to wrest an eternal victory.

It may seem hardly possible for us who live in these days to get and to keep the power to be quiet. Life has changed, and the whole state of society is different from what it was even fifty years ago. Simplicity is going out of fashion. We have no love for quiet things. Even home and church are suffering from the excitement and the supply of the means of excitement which are characteristic

of our time. What a constant rush are the lives of many men and women! Quiet work, quiet pleasure, quiet feeling, quiet thought, quiet prayer are things of which they appear to be utterly ignorant. They must spend even their holidays in crowds, and the noise of the big town or city has become such a part of their nature that they must have the echo of it among the hills and by the sea. They have no power to be quiet.

They chatter, nod, and hurry by,
And never once possess their souls
Before they die.

It is possible, however, to cultivate and preserve the power to be quiet—the quietude not of weakness but of strength, not of passion exhausted but of passion controlled and used, not of a world renounced but of a world subdued to the service of the soul and the obedience of Christ.

Meditation will help us—frequent pauses in our busy days for serious reflection upon life's meaning and end, and for cherishing those highest thoughts which come not in noisy but in silent hours. *Prayer* will help us—the prayer that brings the sense of the Unseen Presence into our life, and the quickening and sustaining thought of the Eternal Goodness and Care; the prayer that means the identification of the human will with the Divine will—rest in God. *The Worship of the Church* will help us—correcting and enlarging our individualism by giving us the sense of universal and eternal relationships. *Obedience* will help us. Great peace have they whose obedience to the highest and best is quick and constant; who, instead of getting away from things, seek rather to get right with things, to be reconciled to the Divine order of the world and life, reconciled to

God. It is the peace of Jesus which the world cannot give nor take away, but which enables one to be quiet in the world, to venture abroad into all its excitements and strifes with a calm and brave heart, and, while seeking things temporal, to win with them and through them all the finest and most enduring things of life.

An Advent Meditation.

“He cometh with clouds.”—REVELATION I. 7.

THE exhortation, “Prepare to meet thy God,” which comes to us across many centuries, has in view life, and not only death; this world, and not only the next. Daily and hourly God is coming to us, and we must train ourselves to be sensitive to His presence and influence, make ourselves ready to discern and find Him. Without constant vigilance and effort we shall soon become blind and dull to the Divine aspects of the world and life.

Yes! God is constantly coming to us. He comes in the clear light of the sky, in every blue day, in the loveliness, sweetness, and bounty of the world; in all gentle affections, sweet charities, and

brave fidelities ; in every loving and faithful heart that blesses us ; in every fair example that wins us ; in everything that makes life beautiful, and dear, and sacred. Why should we think of our God only in connection with what is extraordinary and terrible ? Why should we think of great accidents and misfortunes as if they only were "Divine visitations" ? We have too much of the old Paganism still in our blood. The exceptional is widely regarded as especially Divine, and God is conceived as more fully and immediately present in His strange work of judgment than in His unfailing daily mercies. Let us cease to be such foolish and unbelieving children. Let us prepare to meet God in the beauty and sweetness of the world, and in all the gentle and gracious sanctities of life. For there is nothing, except our sin, which is not full of God. And everything is divinely wonderful.

But in the Scriptures, old and new, we are told that God cometh with clouds, that clouds and darkness are round about Him, that He maketh the clouds His chariot, that the clouds are the dust of His feet, and that His glory is in the clouds. Clouds play a large and important part in the poetry of the Bible, as they do in the pageantry of nature. In Hebrew symbolism they represent the mystery of the Divine presence and manifestation. Yes! God cometh with clouds. Not only is He present in the bright and radiant things which surround and form part of our passing days, but in things gloomy and oppressive, which sometimes tempt us to think that for us the charm of life has vanished for ever. But the darkness as well as the light lies within the circle of the infinite harmony, and the clouds answer to and fulfil the will of God, which is a good will to all mankind.

Taken most literally, how true the words are : "He cometh with clouds." The clouds are such a familiar sight that, as with most common things, we are strangely insensible to their beauty and blessing. We rush here and there over half the world in search of sights, but we hardly lift our eyes to gaze on the pictures of wondrous loveliness and glory which Nature is producing right above our heads every day of the year. Among natural phenomena there is hardly anything more marvellous, more full of divinity, than are the clouds to him who has the eye to see, the soul to feel, and the mind to reflect. It is not surprising that in every age they have been regarded as the dwelling-place of Deity. Here the ancient exhortation is required : "Prepare to meet thy God." We cannot receive this heavenly manifestation unless we are prepared for it. It is given only to those for whom it is pre-

pared—that is, to souls prepared for it.

Who no inward beauty has
No outward beauty sees,
Though all around be beautiful.

How little many of us discern in nature! It is no convincing proof of our culture that we see forms, movements, and tints in the clouds after they have been pointed out to us by painter and poet. We read Ruskin's great chapters on "The Truth of Skies and Clouds," and we are filled with wonder and delight; but it required that gifted teacher to reveal and interpret, to make us look up and perceive a little part of the infinite splendour that had been a long time with us unrecognised. It is good when our artists and poets do so much for us, but they only fulfil their ministry of mediation when they send us back to nature and life more able and eager to see for ourselves the pictures that shine and the poems

that are written there for all who have eyes to see. We must cultivate the power that looks, not merely at things, but into things. To have the fine vision and insight we must have the fine mind and soul. Our spiritual condition is sorrowful if the visions of gloom and glory in the heavens above us fail to touch our hearts, to raise our souls, to overshadow us with the Divine presence and make us feel—Behold! He cometh with clouds.

The more material uses of the clouds are also a veritable advent and revelation of God. The more we think, not only of their beauty and mystery, and the part they play in the culture of man's higher nature, but of the varied ways in which they contribute to make the earth habitable and agreeable, and help to support and comfort the children of men, the more we must feel with the Hebrew poet, "Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the

clouds," and with the seer of Patmos, "He cometh with clouds." We see God wherever we see wisdom and goodness. The presence of wisdom and goodness in material nature is the real presence of God.

But it is the symbolic meaning of the words we are considering that is their true meaning. In the history of the world, in the history of the Church and in individual experience, God has often come to men in clouds, in bewildering darkness and mystery, in great sorrows and strifes. The study of the geologic ages reveals the first advent of the Eternal Power on this earth to have been with clouds. It is a story of upheaving and convulsion, of fierce struggles and triumphs. But over all, in all, and through all we can see God. During these long, dark, chaotic ages we behold life rising slowly but steadily, and the result at last explaining and vindicating the process. And if

God was in the clouds which preceded and accompanied the appearance of the human race on this planet, much more was He and is He in the history of man's making and training. That history, it is true, is full of tragedy; a darkness rests upon our human life, which at times appears so gross as to make almost impossible the thought that it could ever have been the pavilion and scene of the creative energy of Divine holiness and goodness. But as we patiently watch and study the outcome we are moved to exclaim: Behold! He cometh with clouds.

We look back through the centuries and observe many great historical events which we now clearly see to have been real comings of God to the world; but they came, as the Divine advents often do come, with clouds, attended with many and vast evils—war, bloodshed, persecution, crime,

scepticism, civil, social, religious disorganisation and wreck. At first sight they look like terrible calamities, of which we can only think with horror and lamentation. Amid the scenes of unspeakable suffering and wickedness which took place when Jerusalem went down before the power of Rome, even true believers in God might have seen or feared only evil. But the Son of Man came then in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. That revolution established His religion on a spiritual and catholic foundation. Out of the confusion and conflict His truth and spirit came forth to men's sight in worthier and diviner form. He ceased to be a national Christ and His Church a Jewish sect, and began to be known as the Light of the world, the Saviour of mankind, the true Lord and Leader of all faithful souls.

What evils attended the event

we call the Protestant Reformation! From the point of view of culture it appeared to the German poet to be nothing less than a calamity which threw back the progress of mankind for centuries. Unquestionably it was in certain respects a serious loss, religiously as well as intellectually. But revolution was inevitable. The changes which Luther sought had been long and vainly sought in more peaceful ways. They had to wait for the violent storm which swept away along with much intolerable evil much real good. But God came with the clouds. When we muse on the great Christian ideas which the Reformation reintroduced into the thought and life of mankind, and the new spirit which it quickened, we cannot but regard it as one of the advents of the Christ of God to our world.

We, too, are living in critical and eventful times. Not a few

believe that the clouds and darkness which accompanied the dissolution of ancient civilisation will soon cover our sky and the whole scenery of our life. There is unrest and agitation everywhere, the relaxing of old restraints, and the decay of authority—of all authority, at least, that has not its roots struck deep down in the true nature of things. Upon us the ends of a world have indeed come. But let us not be faithless. Our trusts are truer than our fears. God is our refuge and strength. Tumult and confusion are His heralds. He cometh with the clouds—in all these complications of disintegration and change. He unmakes only to recreate. The old earth, full of injustice and inhumanity, is giving place to an earth wherein dwelleth righteousness and love. It is but slowly the Christian ideas and the Christian spirit win the victory, but they are winning it. Every great crisis in the history of

the world is a coming of the Son of Man. It is a factor and agent in the evolution of that Divine Humanity of which Jesus Christ is the Messiah.

The Day of the Lord is at hand, at
hand;
Its storms roll up the sky;
The nations sleep, starving on heaps of
gold;
All dreamers toss and sigh;
The night is darkest before the morn;
When the pain is sorest the child is
born,
And the Day of the Lord is at hand.

And in the Church, as in the world, it is a time of critical strain and trial—a day of judgment to all our institutions, and a last day to some of them. To the superficial observer everything seems to be tending towards chaos. But there is no danger of chaos. God cometh in the clouds, and His Spirit is moving upon the face of the waters. Everywhere we see the signs of a great religious

reconstruction. The movement is not from faith to no faith, but from faith to more and better faith. The sign of the Son of Man is in the heavens. The old prophecy, "I go away that I may come again," is being fulfilled all around us. Christ is coming to us in a more glorious body, and in Spirit more perfectly Divine, coming in larger inspirations of faith, and hope, and love, and coming to-day, as yesterday, to bring us to ourselves, to our brethren, and to God. Even so come, Lord Jesus !

And not only in the life of the Church and the world, but in the individual life it is everlastingly true that God cometh with clouds, with storms which darken and trouble our mortal day, and sometimes bring the fabric of our happiness to the ground. It is a Pagan moralist who tells us that we alter the nature of our misfortunes by putting a different con-

struction upon them. He did not mock his fellows in giving them that counsel. The construction he meant is involved in the relations of our darkest estate, and will some time appear therein. When we see what our adversities, struggles, disappointments, and bereavements have done for us in the way of deepening and refining our nature and life; how they have made us more thoughtful, serious, sympathetic, and drawn us deeper into the fellowship of Christ, then we begin to represent our sorrows differently, to give them a more religious and hopeful interpretation, to confess, Behold! God came with the clouds, and

To feel, although no tongue can prove,
That every cloud that spreads above,
And veileth love, itself is love.

O Thou who art the Soul of goodness in things evil, teach us how to suffer and be strong. Help us to cherish the spirit which brings

good out of evil, and prevents adversities and disappointments from embittering the heart and spoiling the life. Comfort us with a deep sense of Thy goodness in all the varied passages of our earthly experience, and keep us in strength and truth, simplicity and serenity of spirit to the end of our days. Amen.

The Christian Conception of the World and Life.

“The world . . . life . . . things present . . . all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.”—1 COR. III. 22, 23.

THE divineness or sacredness of the present world and the present life is one of the great lessons which in our day we have had set to learn. It is a Christian idea, but its development, like that of all large and living ideas, has been painfully slow and complicated. For many hundreds of years it has been sedulously taught in the name of Christ, and it has been more or less the belief of men, that the kingdom of God is not now and here, but in the future, and in another place. It is not difficult to explain, and in a measure to justify, the attitude of primitive, mediæval, and Puritan Christianity

toward the world and life. Yet there can be little doubt that the separatist attitude is not the true Christian attitude. The incarnation—that perfect union of the Divine and human in the person of Jesus Christ, of which the constitution of man has always been a prophecy—is the consecration of our nature and life. Through Him whose birth we celebrate every returning Christmas we know the world of natural relationship to be a Divine world; fatherhood and motherhood, childhood and brotherhood, our human love and friendship, have had their ideal significance and beauty unveiled, and the families of the earth have been blessed.

The feeling of Jesus toward the world was not that of the ascetic or pessimist. He was in love with this earth and this earthly life. He had all a poet's delight in sky and landscape, in every touch of natural beauty, and not less

delight but more in the world of men and women. He liked to feel the warmth and magnetism of human neighbourhood, and was at home among crowds. Most truly and deeply He entered into our human life. The variety and breadth of His sympathies were a surprise and revelation to many in Galilee and Judea. So little of an ascetic was He that by one class of religionists He was set down as entirely too loose in his ideas of meat and drink and social intercourse. His goodness was genial and loveable, and had all that charm which touches and wins the heart. His communion with God did not mean separation from men. In the spirit and practice of His life earth and heaven, life here and life hereafter, were not opposed to each other. In this world He did not feel that He was absent from God. He had enveloping His whole life, and vitalising every part of it, the

sense of His Father's presence and companionship. He not only came forth from His Father and was going back to His Father, but He saw His Father everywhere, and was nowhere alone, because His Father was with Him. He sought all through His ministry to inspire His disciples and friends with the confidence which was the spiritual atmosphere of His own life, that even here on earth and in this present life they were children in their Father's house.

It is wonderful how very little Jesus said about the mere continuance of life—life hereafter. We can only be sure of some five or six great sayings which have a plain and direct reference to another world. The parables and prophecies which later Christianity transferred to life after death, a more careful examination has shown, were originally connected with a different order of ideas. The kingdom of God on earth is

the central principle of Christ's teaching. Around it is grouped all that He said and taught. "As in heaven so on earth," is the Lord's ideal and prayer.

To win and keep the Christian faith in immortality we must recognise the essential unity of the two lives and the two worlds. It is one life we live on earth and in heaven. Heaven is for those who have made the most and the best of earth. Until we have got the Divine good out of this world we have rightfully but small concern with any other world. The Gospel assumes that a man cannot believe in the next life till he believes in this life. The sense of a larger life beyond will not make itself clear and commanding till the Divine significance of this life has been learned. It is life that is the assurance and revelation of life. To raise the quality of life before death, to make life fuller and deeper, was therefore the

object of the Saviour's mission. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." Immortality is revealed to man by revealing it in man. When life takes on the Christ-like quality it becomes itself the prophecy of more life; we have no doubt or fear about the future; there comes surely if gradually a great trust and hope, a great peace, a sense of encompassment by eternal goodness, a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

The attitude of Jesus Christ towards the world and life must be our attitude, His faith our faith, His spirit our spirit. To be a Christian is to be a man after the order and type of Jesus Christ; it is to think as He thought, feel as He felt, live as He lived; it is to take and keep His attitude toward God and man, toward heaven and earth, toward life here and life hereafter. Taking His mind and spirit as our law and guide we

know that this world is God's as well as the next, and that God is here as well as there. We are not journeying toward a remote Deity, but walking with God. He only finds God who finds Him now and here. God wants us to love and enjoy His world. We can "serve Him with mirth." "All things are yours, things present as well as things to come, because ye are Christ's and Christ is God's." Why should we be afraid to set our lives in harmony with this truth? We are not servants, but children in the house of God. We need not take our pleasures by stealth. "Touch not, taste not, handle not," is a maxim only quoted by the Christian Apostle to be condemned. It is not by negations and prohibitions we can save ourselves or others. To be kept out of the way of temptation and danger is plainly not the Divine way of saving and training men. The guarded life is not the safest

life. Wise restraint is necessary until character is well formed and disciplined, but it is character that is the real and ultimate protection. Commerce and culture need not be anti-Christian. The Christian faith and spirit are meant to influence the world as a renewing principle taking full possession of the natural life, rather than as a destructive principle crushing it. All things may serve the soul. "All things are yours" to use, not abuse. The limitation of liberty may be a temporary necessity, but to learn how to use everything aright is the fundamental law and lesson. Natural joys may blend with Divine sanctities. In and through the earthly things we may find the heavenly realities. We may eat and drink to the glory of God. Sacred and pathetic memories, spiritual ideas and affections, were associated by our Lord with a supper. "Christianity," says Novalis in a suggestive sentence,

“is the capability of everything earthly to become the bread and wine of a Divine life.” Deep in the fellowship of Jesus Christ we learn to take a gracious and bright view of life—even of its hardest conditions and limitations. We learn that there is good in everything save sin, that sin is the only real evil of life, that these mortal years and all their circumstances and experiences mean education—the Father educating His children.

In many ways and by many agencies God is teaching us this great Christian lesson, that here and now we are children in our Father’s house and fulfilling in present human experience the prophetic words: “Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and pilgrims, but members of the household of God.” Every energy of our civilisation is reducing the ancient ills of life, making the world look less and less inhospitable and harsh, and more and

more homelike. By the removal of hardships, by the growth of justice, and that disposition which is fitly named "the enthusiasm of humanity," by the spread of education, and the multiplication of pure and noble interests and pleasures, we are being slowly brought to a new and more Christian sense of the value and sacredness of the present world and the present life.

It has been a common test of the reality and depth of a man's religious life to be able to say, "I am willing and ready to die," but a truer and healthier conception has entered into the thoughts of men. It is good to live. In this world and to-day it is good to live. To make this life as great and sacred as it ever can be; to taste as many sweet and solemn joys as we are able; to throw ourselves, mind, heart, and soul into the work of helping the world, and enabling the lives we

touch on every side to find and experience the goodness of existence; to bear quietly and bravely the hard and sorrowful realities of our personal lot as the beneficent discipline of Heaven—this is being more and more clearly seen by us to be the purpose of pure Christianity; and striving to be obedient to this Heavenly vision, we feel that we are making for whatever awaits us beyond—the truest and amplest preparation.

The Immanent God.

“Quench not the Spirit.”—1 THESS. v. 19.

THERE are some truths which we learn slowly and somewhat reluctantly. How slow we are to recognise and appreciate the significance of that lofty spiritual conception of God as the ever-present indwelling Life of the world, which in these days is making all things new! We think of God as far off, and as only present with the world, now and again, at certain points of time and in certain places. We find it difficult to believe and realise that He is ever near; not only beyond the world but in the world; not only the Ruler of man from without, but the pervading and quickening Spirit of his secret life.

It is not a mere dream of the poetic and devout mind that God is present everywhere in His universe, but a truth of reason and faith. The Divine immanence is the highest conception we can reach of the Divine relation to the world and life. Creation is instinct with the Spirit of God. In its law and forces reside Divine Intelligence and Will. The things we see around us have no life of their own; in God they live and move. The loveliness of the world is the light of His countenance. He is the Power, the Wisdom, the Beauty, the Severity, the Gentleness, the Goodness we behold in nature.

But the Eternal Spirit who fills heaven and earth with His glory is present in a fuller and higher measure in man. It is not our nature that separates us from God, but evil conduct and character. God, and Christ, and man are of one nature. We are God's

kindred, says St. Paul. He is the Father of our spirits. His essential nature is our essential nature; His essential life is our essential life. There is something of God in every man—a germ of Divine life. There is no such creature as “a mere man”—a man in whom there is no breath or spark of Godhead. The idea of the Incarnation is profoundly true; we only require to enlarge it. God in Christ remains, and must remain, the central fact and truth of the Christian religion; but it is also true that Christ is the revelation and prophecy of the Divine Presence and Life in humanity. It is the end for which God reveals Himself that the Divine may live in the human, that God may dwell in man, and man dwell in God. Not God in sacramental bread and wine, but God in man is the Real Presence.

Nothing can be simpler than the doctrine or teaching concerning

the Holy Spirit as we find it in the Bible, before it has been hardened into a dogma, and beset and embarrassed by speculative questions and disputes. It is just this: God not only dwells in the material universe, and not only in Jesus Christ, but in all men in more or less degree, the Life of their life, the source and inspiration of all that is fair and worthy. The gift of the Spirit is not something for which we have to wait; we have it now in our nature and life, and we shall have it more and more according to our faithfulness to what we have already received. Everything in us that is good and not evil; all noble faculty and affection; all truth, wisdom, purity and love; all the hidden influences which move our minds and hearts to better things; all those suggestions and impulses which have sometimes been foolishly described as "mere natural goodness"—all are the movements and signs of

the indwelling and inspiring Spirit of God.

In the sacred Scriptures we are bidden reverence ourselves, and reverence all men. And to do this we have only to know ourselves as we truly are. Let us believe in the indwelling God. Let us believe in that Divine inspiration which is the soul's native endowment, also in that Divine inspiration which is continually proffered, and by which our life may be quickened and unfolded immeasurably. Every impulse or yearning after good is the presence and pressure of the Divine Spirit in the human spirit. We quench the Spirit of God when, by our carelessness or neglect of self-discipline, we allow anything that is good in us to fade away and perish—any natural faculty or aptitude, any true affection, any fine feeling, any right moral or religious impulse, any spiritual aspiration.

(1) In the Bible such endow-

ments as physical strength, mechanical skill, mental acuteness, and wisdom are spoken of as the presence and inspiration of the Spirit of God in man. We do not, as a rule, think of the Divine Spirit as inspiring men to design buildings and furniture, to work in gold and silver and brass, to discover the secrets of nature, and to administer national affairs. We confine the Most High to clerical, missionary and evangelistic matters. Our life is practically atheistic, "without God," except so far as the interests of the individual soul and of the Church are concerned. But the Bible is right, and our ordinary thought about ordinary life is wrong. We have nothing which we have not received. Every good gift cometh down from God. It is the inspiration of the present God which still enables men to do all manner of skilful work, to invent, and plan, and execute, to make discoveries, and to think

rightly. Must not this be the true and supreme end of all education and discipline—so to quicken, develop and strengthen the natural faculties that they may be the fit instruments or channels through which the Divine Spirit may communicate His thought and reveal His will—His thought and will, not only concerning ecclesiastical and purely religious concerns, but concerning all the manifold interests of the wide human world in which we live?

We resist the Spirit when we do not make the most and the best of our natural endowments or gifts; and we quench the Spirit when, through the neglect of proper training and exercise, we allow any such gifts to grow less, and finally, to die out, as any gift will that is not wisely and constantly cultivated. Men quench the Spirit by allowing the sensual nature to act as a drag upon their energy. We have heard a master say of a

workman: "He is not the man he was, he has not the same power and skill since he took to drink." We have heard much the same thing said of lawyers and doctors, artists and preachers. We have seen with our own eyes indolence, intemperance, sensuality, the lust of money and social position, pride, envy and malice injuring the finer capabilities of men, killing their intellectual force, and sometimes destroying that mysterious power or gift to which we give the name of genius. Now what does all this mean when we look at things in the light of God? It means that this man and that man have been quenching the Spirit—the power God gave them in order to be something and to do something, to serve their generation, and to be helpful to the world. Let us not by laziness, neglect, or disobedience quench the Spirit—dissipate or destroy the gifts which are the inspiration of the Almighty.

(2) The spirit of truth in man is the presence and activity in our thought and feeling of the God of truth. To resist the impulse that urges us to seek after truth is to resist the movement of the Divine mind in our minds, and to stifle conviction is to quench the Spirit. How effectually do worldliness and bigotry quench the Spirit of truth ! All that many people want in life is money, or social position, or a comfortable and easy time of it; and possessed and ruled by such vulgar aims they have little care for truth. But selfishness is not always coarse; it is sometimes very refined, taking on plausible and subtle forms and calling itself love of family and love of church. Too many men and women are lovers of themselves rather than lovers of truth. Let no selfish passion, no worldly aim, no sectarian ambition, no fear, no vanity, no prejudice, no love of quietness, no love of party or

church, ever tempt us to resist the Spirit of truth. Let us reverence and be loyal to conviction. It is the love of truth that brings salvation to the mind. Indifference to truth is atheism to God. God is the deepest self of every man. A man untrue to what is best in himself—to honest and serious conviction—is untrue to God.

(3) The sense of right in man is the presence and movement of the Spirit, which he is exhorted not to quench. What is called conscience—that voice rising from the depths of our being which speaks to us of duty, and troubles, if it does not destroy the comfort of every excuse we can make for disobedience, is in truth what our fathers said it was—the voice of God, though sometimes misinterpreted; the utterance of an obligation we apprehend, but do not create. We resist and are in danger of quenching the Spirit of God when

we refuse to be led by our feeling of right, by our sense of duty; when we are disobedient to the whispers of conscience, to our inward drawings toward good and our inward shrinkings from evil. The sense of right is the disclosure of obligation and the call to obedience. Conscience is not infallible, yet there is no surer way of getting to the real truth and right of things than by obedience to the highest and best we know. Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness. By obedience, by throwing ourselves into union with our feelings of right and making haste to obey them, we are certain to win the guidance we seek and need. But if we trifle with conscientious impulse and scruple, and try to argue right that which is plainly wrong, we are in danger of committing the awful sin of quenching the Spirit of God: in danger of destroying the moral sense and of

turning the light that is in us to darkness.

(4) The feelings which stand apart from our selfish cravings, and which urge us to help others; the impulses of love, pity, generosity, and sympathy—what are they but the presence and movement of the Divine Spirit in the human heart? Let us identify ourselves, not with our lower but with our higher nature; not with our selfish, but with our unselfish affections and impulses. Love is of God, for God is love. “He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” Let us beware of harbouring the anti-social feelings and passions, such as malice, envy, unforgiveness and the disposition to put the claims of private wellbeing before everything else. Let us ever remember that we are free to cherish or to quench our highest impulses. The Divine action in and on man is not mechanical, but moral; it is

not coercion, but impulse and suggestion; not compulsory force, but quickening influence. We can resist the Spirit of God—resist wilfully and violently and resist by our undesigned neglect and indifference.

(5) We have moments and experiences in life when we feel God to be more than near, when we become acquainted with the capacities and possibilities of our nature and life, and we apprehend what is meant by the essential unity of God and man, and realise the communion of the Holy Spirit. Trifle, forget and disobey as we may, yet we have our serious hours. We are not the petty, superficial creatures we sometimes take ourselves and our fellows to be. Not only around us but within us there is the mystery of God. Our nature is deeper than we know or are capable of knowing. Our littleness and shallowness are only seeming. Mind,

heart and soul draw their life from infinite sources. We are related to all that is most Divine in the universe. And we have experiences which make us aware of all this; experiences awful yet glorious with indwelling God, and which bring with them new and wonderful accessions of spiritual light and impulse. The worldly mind, considered in itself, may be enmity against God; but men of the world are not wholly worldly. They have their deeper and better moments—moments of inspiration, of self-surprise and self-revelation.

No man can think, nor in himself perceive,
Sometimes at waking, in the street
sometimes,
Or, on the hillside, always unforewarned
A grace of finer being, a larger life upon
His own impinging, to which his own
seems
But thick cloud to make that visible,
Touched by a sudden glory round the
edge.

Such inspirations we all have,

hours of moral exaltation when the Spirit of God breathes upon our life and kindles to a warm glow the fires of spiritual affection and impulse. Let us obey these heavenly visions. Let us have the courage to live by the truest and highest revealed to us. The life of our best hours and experiences is our true life. Not to strive to make these best hours the standard by which we daily live, to be disloyal to that which we see and worship and love in the most exalted and radiant moments of our existence, to make no effort to preserve and perpetuate the glory of this occasional spiritual life, is to resist and quench the Spirit.

O God, the Holy Spirit of our secret life, the Unseen Source and Root of all our goodness,—of all the good thoughts we have ever thought, of all the good feelings we have ever cherished, and of all the good deeds we have ever done; give us grace, we pray Thee, to

covet earnestly the best gifts, to nourish and maintain the things that are simple and true, and always to offer unto Thee the sacrifice of a consecrated and faithful life. Amen.

The Value of a Day.

“ Are there not twelve hours in the day ? ”

JOHN II. 9.

THE one art, it has been said, which man has never learned is to take the things that are now and here at their real worth. Even our religion, in its common interpretations, spends too much time on the things that have been or are to come. The past and the future absorb by far the larger part of the interest of too many. We need to recall our minds from yesterday and to-morrow, to consider the worth of the present and and passing day.

1. *To-day—How Related to Yesterday and To-morrow.*

The secret of true living is to be found in making the most of

each day. We are putting yesterday to its truest and noblest use when we are using its experience to make the life of to-day better. We are preparing for the morrow in the truest and noblest way when we are striving with all our might to be faithful to the opportunity of to-day. To spend to-day in looking away from it, backward to yesterday, or forward to the morrow, is simply fatal to the highest purposes and issues of life.

It is true that the power of looking before and after is one of the most characteristic endowments of man. And it is not denied that there is a way of living in the present which makes impossible all best efforts and attainments. We are certainly not making the most of to-day if we are not bringing to bear upon its events, relations, and duties the wisdom drawn from the experience of yesterday, and the

inspiration that comes from the thought of the morrow.

Memory has its gracious and serious uses. It may be good, now and again, to yield ourselves to the spell of past things. To be taken away for a brief moment from our exciting and exacting life into the peace of yesterday may refresh and strengthen us, rescue us from depressed feelings and narrow views, enable us to perceive and appreciate better the opportunity of the present, and renew our energy for the never-ending struggle. We are making a good use of the yesterdays of our life when we are taking their lessons to heart, in order to protect and improve the life of the new day that is passing over us.

And, if we are truly wise, we shall not be indifferent to the past of the life of mankind and its teaching. It will at least show us that certain ways of dealing with our great speculative and practical questions

lead to certain conclusions and results, and thus save us from a very tragic waste of time and energy. Universal history has been called "a kind of memory" for the race; it is also a kind of Bible—part of that larger and equally Divine Bible whose canon is never closed. Sound progress is ever conservative of all that is finest and best in the old life it leaves behind; it does not allow one jot of true substance, one tittle of true worth, to pass away till it is fulfilled in something truer and better.

And "looking before" may sometimes be as much a duty as "looking after." Experience teaches us the need of the onlooking and expectant spirit. We are saved by hope from discouragement and despair, saved also from indolence and ignoble contentment with ourselves and our surroundings. In our hopefulness lies the spring of progress and the promise

of achievement. The hopeful temper, kindled and fed by faith in the Eternal Goodness, is the temper of inspiration. It is the temper of all the great teachers and leaders of the race. And the humblest man, moving among simplest duties, requires some touch of it to redeem his life from pettiness and vulgarity. It is essential to the working out of that great salvation, whose watch-words are Character and Service, that one should feel that his life is linked to Divine purposes and movements. "Where there is no vision the people perish." Tomorrow gives larger and deeper significance to the life of to-day.

Granting then, as we may do most readily, that a true and noble life is only possible by bringing to bear upon to-day the experience of yesterday and the hope of tomorrow, yet this concession does not diminish the value of to-day. We are not to live as if to-day

stood alone—unrelated and apart; but we are called to live in to-day—in to-day, not in yesterday; in to-day, not in to-morrow. We have to guard against that kind of looking back, and that kind of looking forward, which would tempt us to forget or slight the claims and duties, on the fulfilment of which depend the preservation of the best life of the past, and the realisation of the best hopes we can cherish for the future. We have to fight against moods and habits of thought and feeling which breed indifference to the present and contempt for it. The past and the future, yesterday and to-morrow, are not being wisely used when they are robbing to-day of interest and meaning; when we are so absorbed by memories or expectations that we have not energy enough to make the most and best of the present opportunity.

Let us be loyal to the life of to-

day. Let us not give to yesterday more than its due. True life means unresting movement, aspiration, and endeavour. Even the man of many years is but beginning life, and cannot spare much time for recollection and regret. What we experienced or achieved yesterday is but small when compared with what remains. Let us, on the other hand, while cherishing the hope and prophecy of to-morrow, not sink into mere dreamers. The glory we see and seek cannot be born without our whole-hearted co-operation. Let us make of our heavenly visions inspirations to present activity. The man of faith ought to be the man of works, and the most ideal man the most practical man.

II. *To-day—its importance.*

To-day is the supreme and critical moment of life. Our vital concern is ever with to-day. Life in to-day is a clear and impressive

feature of Biblical teaching. The Bible delights in the present tense. "Now" is its accepted and saving time. The emphasis of both Testaments is on to-day. "To-day if ye will hear His voice harden not your hearts." "I must work while it is day." To look back is, in the judgment of the Master of our life, to unfit ourselves for any share in the work of the kingdom of God. To be loyal to the Christian idea and order of life, we must be ready to break with the old for the sake of the new. With absolute rigour Jesus Christ ever insisted upon this heroic renunciation of the past, and this heroic obedience to the present inspiration. "Let the dead bury their dead, follow thou Me." "He that saveth his life shall lose it."

"Be not anxious for the morrow" is another great Gospel saying. It was spoken to raise the troubled heart above all undue

and useless care, and with a view to the concentration of thought and energy on the duty of to-day. It is a word perfectly true and wise. It is folly to try to grasp too much of life at once. To take the days one by one is Divine wisdom. A day may seem but a small section of time to measure and command, but it holds about as much care and responsibility as our minds can embrace and bear. The only way to save ourselves from a past, the memory of which will be a reproach and a burden, is to care well for each new day before it leaves us to take its place among the irrevocable yesterdays. The only way to prepare for the morrow is through fidelity to the duty of to-day. To-day found us as yesterday left us; to-morrow will find us as to-day leaves us.

There is little need, then, to dwell on the past. It is not behind us. In a very real sense it goes with us. Names pass away,

but forces abide. We stand to-day in vital moral connection with all the days we have ever lived. The yesterdays are still with us to bless, or to curse. It is true, in a way, that each new day may be a new beginning, and that there is never a point in life when we may not move on to something better, and yet each new day is the outcome of the day before. The new continues, it does not efface the old. There is no "dead past;" the past is living in the present. We cannot get away from these inexorable yesterdays. Their life lives in what we are to-day; in the fibre and quality of mind and soul; in thought and feeling; in taste, tendency, and habit; in everything that goes to make up what we call character. "God requireth that which is past." The good and the ill we do find us out. We reap what we sow. Every act of every day has its effect upon our character. Our present

character is the Divine judgment upon our past conduct. The "Great White Throne" is not far away in the future. Here and now it is set up in its majesty. Every day we stand at the bar of God. Every day is a doomsday. The Divine justice does not require the machinery of a vast public trial to make manifest good and evil, to reward right-doing and punish wrong-doing. Time is part of eternity, and every day of time has in it the essence of eternity. The future will only reveal what God has been always doing.

But to-day is not only a history of the past, it is also a prophecy of the future. It is by watching to-day we can tell what will be on the morrow. Foresight is truly insight. The power to foresee and forecast is the power to discern the natural and necessary tendency and result of certain principles and habits of life. Life has no sharp epochs. There is no violent

break between yesterday and to-day. Whatever is to come out of to-day exists in to-day. The future is not a revolution, but an evolution. To-day is the child and heir of yesterday; to-morrow will be the child and heir of to-day.

It is by a great perversion that so much of our religious teaching directs our thoughts to the life of to-morrow—to what follows death. It is plainly not the will of God that we should think much of the hereafter while we are here. There are seasons and pauses in life when "other worldliness" becomes the most natural and proper mood and habit of the mind, yet frequent and morbid thought about the future is a hindrance and not a help to sound Christian progress. What we are now in life and character, in our relations to God and man, is the main thing. The future can hold no promise of good, save what is laid up by present faithfulness.

In quietness and confidence we may leave what is to happen after death to the Everlasting Father and Redeemer of souls, while we assure ourselves that the only possible preparation for the worthy use of another life is the worthy use of this life. Strictly speaking, there can be no special preparation for the future. The whole of life, and not isolated acts, experiences, and hours, is the real preparation. It is by living we prepare to live. He who lives faithfully and well to-day, filling each day with truth and righteousness, love and peace, with honest and earnest labour for God and mankind, has no need or cause to be anxious for the morrow. Whatever happens, it must ever in this world, and in all the worlds, be well with him.

3. *To-day—its Blessing and Opportunity.*

What a great and royal gift is

a day! It comes to us laden with blessing and promise, full of history and prophecy. It has taken many thousands of years to prepare it for us. In the very fuel that feeds its fires is the vegetation of primeval ages. The effort to realise the tremendous cost at which we have everything in the daily order and blessing of life is baffling even to the imagination. Every day that dawns has countless and complex relations with things far and wide.

This to-day
Washed Adam's feet, and streams away
Far into yon eternity.

Ancient Egypt and Israel, Greece and Rome, Scandinavia and primitive Germany, priests and philosophers, prophets and poets, discoverers and inventors, innumerable thinkers and workers, heroes and saints, known and unknown, have helped to prepare the materials out of which to-day's

opportunity has been made. We are the heirs of the ages in a most real sense. We inherit the good, material and moral, wrought out through the experiences of many men and many races of men through many centuries. In the life of to-day are the results of the labour and struggle of all the yesterdays.

Whatever of true life there was of yore
Along our veins is springing;
For us its martyrs die, its prophets soar,
Its poets still are singing.

“Write it on your heart,” says Emerson, “that every day is the best day of the year.” No day is poor and commonplace—if we do not make it so. The judgment of the pessimist is virtually a condemnation of himself and his own way of living. To the prepared soul every day is full of marvel and joy. No glory has passed from the earth. The old world is ever a new world. Life has lost none

of its ancient fascination ; it is as full as ever of grandeur and loveliness, of wonder and mystery. All the things which deep-seeing men have seen to be in human life, the things which have inspired the finest poetry of the world, are in human life to-day. Every day has its comedies and tragedies. Genius does not invent, it discovers and interprets. To find examples of heroism we need not turn to classic pages, nor search the annals of martyrdom. Heroism is as unfailing a reality as the daily dawn. Around and in each day are all the great marvels of creation, all the moral forces and splendours of life, and all the sacred realities to which the deeply-moved soul has witnessed in every age. The miracle of creation is renewed every day. Light and heat, and all the ancient creative forces, are still active, doing the same kind of work they did when "the morning

stars sang together, and the first-born of the sons of God shouted for joy." "My Father," said Jesus, "works continuously, and I work." The Holy Spirit is not a vanished influence. Revelation is not reminiscence or report merely. The great story of God with man, of which the Bible is the record, is not an exceptional episode in the history of our race. God is the living God and the God of the living. What He was to prophets and apostles He will be to us. The difference between ages and men in their realisation of God is fundamentally a difference in spiritual life and culture. God is no respecter of ages or persons.

This time is equal to all time that's
past ;

 Man is to God
What he hath ever been.

The Divine vision can be won,
and the Divine voice heard, to-day.
Personal and immediate com-

munion with God is not the accident but the essence of religion. In the soul is the Real Presence. The Father is everywhere near to His children. Every mountain may be a point of contact between God and man, and the foot of Jacob's ladder may be touched anywhere. We have in to-day all that men ever had—the same spiritual resources, the same Divine helps. The heavenly realities belong to the present as much as to the past or the future. Loyalty to the laws of the highest growth will make to-day as sacred as yesterday, and one of the days of heaven upon earth. The eternal life of the Christian Gospel stands not in quantity but in quality of years, and is shared by us here according to our faithfulness.

It is a common saying that life is but a day. It is used to express the awful and pathetic brevity of our life here on this earth. It is the utterance of an impressive

truth, common yet never commonplace. But when we say each day is a life, we are giving expression to a truth of deeper importance, and of greater practical value and use. There is nothing small. In the smallest things are the elements of the greatest. One day of life has in it the quality of the whole. It is grander than we know or can imagine. It has infinite relations. In its acts and relations we see God making history, and man making his own future—making the character which creates condition and decides destiny.

Are we making the most and the best of the opportunities of to-day? Many people are sighing and crying for the larger opportunities to which they expect death will introduce them, who do not know the value of a day. One of our poets has represented the days coming to us with their faces veiled, but when they have passed beyond our reach and call the

draped figures become radiant,
and the gifts we slighted are seen
to be right royal treasures.

Daughters of Time, the hypocritic Days,
Muffled and dumb like barefoot der-
vishes,
And marching single in an endless file,
Bring diadems and fagots in their hands.
To each they offer gifts after his will,—
Bread, kingdoms, stars, and sky that
holds them all.
I, in my pleachéd garden, watched the
pomp,
Forgot my morning wishes, hastily
Took a few herbs and apples, and the
Day
Turned and departed. I, too late,
Under her solemn fillet saw the scorn.

Let us make the most and the
best of each day's opportunity for
pure and noble enjoyment. Let
not our sorrow for some vanished
good, nor our expectation of some
promise or expected good, make us
insensible to, or ungrateful for, the
good which is now and here. Let
us train our faculties to observe
and appreciate all the gracious

blessings of daily life. We need not be suspicious of what gives pleasure and joy. The lesson of joy is as Divine a lesson to learn as that of obedience and sacrifice.

Let us make the most and the best of each day's opportunity for thought and meditation. It was a good rule of a great man never to allow one day to pass without reading something that would quicken and enrich his mind. The inner life constantly needs deepening. Knowledge is growing from more to more, and God is ever revealing Himself. Every day is a day of revelation. We must follow the Spirit of truth. Our highest attainments ought only to be new starting-points. The mind closed against new visions and interpretations of truth is already dying.

Let us make the most and the best of the opportunity for moral and spiritual growth and beneficent service which is afforded by the daily task. It is in the sphere

of the every-day duties most men must win the discipline which our earthly life is meant to yield, must form the character which is the crown of life, and prepare themselves for wider usefulness. No violent, overstrained efforts are necessary to achieve that moral and spiritual success which Scripture calls salvation—deliverance from weakness and sin, the reconciliation of the life to the order and will of God, the perfection of character. We may through the humblest fidelities reach the Christian righteousness, and rise out of our selfishness into the Christian generousities and sympathies. It is only by living up to the ideal and duty of making each day perfect in itself that we can make life a spiritual triumph.

There are only "twelve hours in a day," and yet how much can be done in and with a day.

One day with life and heart
Is more than enough to find a world.

"A day is extremely long," says Goethe, "if only one knows how to appreciate and employ it." The power of working miracles has been defined as essentially the power to take things which everybody has, and to do with them what nobody else can do. The miracle of the sun standing still is wrought every day by earnest and resolute men. Purpose, perseverance, self-control and self-devotion can in effect arrest the flight of time, and make the shadow go back on the dial. The length of a day is not to be measured by its hours and minutes, but by what we put into it and take out of it; by what we think and feel, do and strive to do, in it. It is the full and fruitful day that is the long day. We all have days that are better than a thousand—golden days that redeem months and years of languid days. They are not meant to be splendid isolations. To their level of power, of service,

of joy, God would have us raise the life of every day. "The greatest value of any day," says John Foster, "ought to be taken as the fixed value of every day."

What are we doing with our days? We ought to be striving with all our might to get as much real good as we can out of them, and to do as much real good as we can in them. We cannot afford to trifle with them. No miracle will bring back the days we throw away. The opportunities of life do not repeat themselves. There is no to-morrow for the work that ought to be done to-day. The cry "Too late" is not false. The mercy of God is infinite every way, but an opportunity lost is lost for ever. Other doors may open, but that door is shut.

The exhortation, "Prepare to meet thy God," is, indeed, an exhortation to prepare for life, not death. Every day we meet God; every day we need to be prepared

to meet Him. We prepare for what we suppose to be great days. But every day that dawns may be a great day, a Divine day. For every day brings opportunities of knowing truth, of enjoying beauty, of doing right, of helping man, and of serving God. Let us not cheat ourselves of the heavenly good. Let us be ready for every day, that we may derive from it its blessings. The supreme opportunities of life are not in the circumstances and seasons when we are most clearly conscious of them. "In such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh." It was on a common day the Saviour of men met Zaccheus on the Jericho road, and said to him, "Come down; this day I must abide at thy house." It was on a common day He met the woman of Samaria at the well, and by His conversation made that day a day of revelation for all the ages. To-day all good and great things are

possible. Let us by our faith and faithfulness, by our obedience to all best visions and impulses, turn it into a day of salvation, a day of God, one of the days of the Son of Man, one of the days of heaven upon earth.

Forenoon, and afternoon, and night !
Forenoon,
And afternoon, and night ! Forenoon,
and—what !
The empty song repeats itself. No
more !
Yea, that is life : make this forenoon
sublime,
This afternoon a psalm, this night a
prayer.
And Time is conquered, and thy crown
is won.

A Simple Gospel.

"Trust in the Lord and do good."
PSALM xxxvii. 3.

It is good, in these days of religious questioning and strife, to get back to such a simple confession of faith as this: "Trust in the Lord and do good." This little, familiar text covers everything essential; it expresses the sum and substance of religion, and the great secret of right living. To bring us to the temper and state of trust and obedience is the end of everything; the end of our mortal discipline and experience; the end of all human aspirings and strivings, and of all Divine inspirings and revealings; the end of the ministry of Jesus Christ, and of all ministries of the Spirit and ministries of the Church.

The Son of Man lived and taught, suffered and died, to make this trust and obedience possible and more possible: to bring men out of bondage to invisible terrors and selfish passions; to quicken and nourish in men confidence toward God and loyalty to the Divine order and law of human life.

The great problem which is set before every man is not to solve and interpret the riddle of the universe, but to live faithfully and bravely his own life. We need just so much religious assurance and inspiration as will enable us to do this; enough to give us confidence, courage, hope in the struggle of our days to be the men and women we are meant to be and ought to be.

There are questions concerning life and God which we cannot answer, mysteries which the keenest thought cannot penetrate, and which rise before us in every direction in all their ancient

solemnity. And yet that matters not, if only we can know enough to enable us to have confidence in the essential goodness of the universe and life; enough to nourish the calm and deepening sense that all is well; enough for the perception and performance of duty; enough for the culture of character; enough for the exercise of patience, charity, and hope; enough to inspire strength and peace. It is just this measure of knowledge, and no more, which we need for the practical purposes of life.

We do not need the knowledge of a god to live the life and do the work of a man; but, on the other hand, there must be some knowledge before there can be trust, some foundation in knowledge for the faith which goes beyond knowledge. The God with whom we have to do is not an austere taskmaster, seeking to reap where He has not sown; He gives us

grounds and reasons for trust before He solicits trust. In the world of nature and man, in the best thoughts of our own minds, in the best affections of our own hearts, in the best experiences of our own lives, in the witness of saintly and prophetic souls, in the life and work of Jesus Christ—God has revealed enough of His character and will to quicken and sustain trust in His righteousness and love, when clouds and darkness are around about Him, and mystery besets us behind and before, and we cannot walk any more by sight.

In all the range of ancient literature we do not find anywhere a deeper sense of the mystery of life than in the Old Testament, yet it is pervaded with a pure and lofty trust in all-wise and almighty Goodness. From end to end it inculcates and justifies constant and complete confidence in God as true wisdom. It is full of hints

and glimpses of that diviner vision and understanding of life, of those larger spiritual interpretations and consolations which came by Jesus Christ. The history of much that is called Christianity may be largely the history of distrust and fear, but when we return to the simplicity that is in Christ we return to confidence and courage, to tranquillity and joy. The true voice of our religion is the voice of Jesus to the trembling, storm-tossed disciples on the old Galilean sea, "Be of good cheer, be not afraid."

The great trusts of religion which find expression in the Bible are the anticipations of what science and experience have been disclosing and verifying. The confidence that all things are very good in their purpose and end, and that the universe is essentially beneficent in all its operations though it transcends exact knowledge, is yet justified by it. An earlier science, by its revela-

tion of the severe side of nature, may have turned some minds away from faith, but later and truer knowledge is restoring religious conviction by quickening and increasing our confidence in the nature and course of things. The more we search and the more we study the relation of each part to the whole, and of the whole to each, the more do we see that what we call evil is but good in the making. There is no trace of curse or caprice anywhere. Everywhere we see wisdom and goodness—one purpose, one law, one power, one God throughout the universe. At the root of all the seeming hardness and severity of nature there is mercy and faithfulness. We live in a world that is under God's love and blessing, not "under God's wrath and curse." The universe is what Jesus Christ said it was, "My Father's house."

We cannot hide from ourselves

the dark side of human life, and we do not want a faith which does not fully recognise it; but when we study the drift and tendency of things God becomes His own interpreter. God and good are perceived to be one, and our human world is seen to be moving through such processes as moral growth requires toward harmony with good. "If God made this world," says one of our philosophical pessimists, "I should not like to be God; its woes would break my heart." But the world is not made; it is only in the process of making. The week of creation is a long week. "Rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him." The end will explain and vindicate both the length and severity of the process. God's world, when finished, will be far better than our best thought of what a world might and ought to be. A careful study of the past affords sufficient justification for

our largest expectations as to the coming years. The movement is ever toward good. The centuries grow juster, more merciful, more peaceful.

Step by step since time began,
We see the steady gain of man.

We may, indeed, trust life as meaning our good. It may be difficult to understand things when we are in the midst of them; but by slow stages the knowledge dawns on every thoughtful and faithful man that life is underlaid with beneficent purpose. The conditions may be hard, but character can only be formed through struggle; and the formation or training of character is the justification and explanation of the discipline of our days. We grow by what seems to thwart us; defeats are sometimes the best victories, and adversities and griefs the very conditions of fulfilling the noblest prophecy of life.

The words, "I will trust and not be afraid," describe what ought to be our attitude toward God in all our personal and immediate relations to Him. God ought not to be the object of any base fear; He is the refuge from all such fear. "What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee." To see God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ is to trust Him and to be at rest in Him. We are much, it is true, that we ought not to be, and little that we ought to be. We need no arguments to convince us that we are weak and sinful. We have terrible inward evidence of transgression and failure. But it is only the heart without faith and hope that wears itself out in regrets and fears. We who profess to believe in the Eternal Love revealed in the character and Cross of Jesus Christ need not have tormenting memories and forebodings as our companions in the coming days.

The most central truth of our religion is just the helpfulness—the everlasting helpfulness of God. This—when we put aside all those accretions which have gathered about it in its passage through the thoughts of men—this is the message of Jesus Christ to mankind, what lies at the heart of His Gospel,—there is mercy for all, love for all, hope for all, help for all in God. And He, indeed, is the Saviour of the world, our Saviour from all ignorant and guilty fears, who can inspire us with this triumphant confidence, this enthusiasm of faith in Eternal Goodness and Mercy. We do not require to be protected and delivered from God; He is our Protector and Deliverer. His character is the ultimate ground of human trust.

The attitude of trust ought to be our attitude toward the mysterious future. It is natural to desire some clear and authentic

assurance concerning the life that lies on the other side of death. A longing to pierce the darkness comes at times to all who have loved and lost. When knowledge fails superstition often comes in, and men and women become the victims of their own credulous fancies and fears. But it is well that we do not know. In drawing a veil over to-morrow God is not dealing with us as an austere and capricious Master, but as a Father who pities His children and knows what they can bear, and what is best for the healthy movement and progress of their life. We must leave the future to trust and hope. Yet it is not altogether a matter of uncertainty. The Divine Goodness is an everlasting certainty. God will be in the future what He is in the present. He rules all the worlds with equal justice and equal love. Not alone for these brief and troubled mortal years is He our Father

and Saviour, but for ever. His laws will never play false with us; His mercy will never fail us. In this life we are in the hollow of His hand, and death only casts us more entirely into His righteous and gracious power. Let us put aside all tormenting fears and anxieties as to what God may be or do to us hereafter. Outside of ourselves the universe holds nothing that we need dread. Faith is not perfect till it attains to this calm acceptance of the universe; this calm confidence towards the seen and the unseen; this calm sense of the unknown as being as trustworthy as the known. Whatever may be the mystery of the future, the most truly Christian disposition is the most trustful and hopeful disposition. In a universe over which such a God reigns as Jesus Christ revealed there is surely nothing too good to be true. The reality will be better than our best

thought, and fairer than our fairest dream. Here and hereafter we must reap what we sow, yet the great moral reality which Scripture calls "the wrath of God" is but the severity of the Divine Goodness after all. In all, and through all the Father is redeeming and educating His children. From His love no soul is ever outcast; to His love no soul is ever lost.

And so, beside the silent sea,
I wait the muffled oar;
No harm from Him can come to me
On ocean or on shore.

"Trust in the Lord"—*there is our attitude toward the Unknown and the Unknowable.* The Unknown and the Unknowable may be, and ought to be trusted. With one of our modern seers we surely can say, "All I have seen bids me trust the Creator for all I have not seen."

"Do good"—*there is our duty in the region of the Known,* in the

realm of human relation and circumstance, in the realm of daily life. We cannot choose our life, but we can choose the way we shall live it. We can resolve and strive whatever betides, to be good and to do good, ever to be loyal to the truest and best we know, and thus to compel the rapidly vanishing days to leave a blessing behind. We can subdue the temper which troubles and makes unlovely our life with others. We can put out of our business everything which cannot bear the searching scrutiny of the righteous Lord and Brother of men. So near is this, and so simple is the beginning of the Christian life. So near as this and so simple is the way out of perplexity and doubt toward certainty and peace.

Let us do good and trust in the Lord. Let us speak and act the truth, confident in the ultimate victory of truth. Let us do the right, even against every apparent

interest, assured that it can never be our real interest to set ourselves at variance with the Divine law. The man utterly loyal to truth and right in all his strivings and in all the critical hours of his life, is the man who has the most real faith in God. Whatever happens, it must, ever in this world and in all the worlds be well with him. The universe is in league with truth and righteousness of life. To be moving towards good is to have directly on our side the power that is making and ruling the world for good, and to have become active partakers in the Divine triumph over evil.

O, Thou from whom we come and to whom we go, the Beginning of our days, the End of our mortal journey and the Home of our souls ! perfect that within us which concerneth us. Give us to discern the purpose for which Thou hast sent us here. Give us the power to do

the work which Thou hast set for us to do. Keep us from following what is false and vain and unprofitable. Reconcile us to Thy will. Help us to obey as Thy Belovéd Son obeyed; and to trust in God and love man even as He trusted and loved. Take out of our hearts all suspicion and fear, and let our honest doubts ripen into larger and richer trusts. Make us calm and strong in the faith that Thou art always near, that our little lives are part of Thine, and that in this world and in every world the Eternal God is our Refuge, and underneath us are the Everlasting Arms. We pray in His name who made known Thy gracious purposes to mankind. Amen.

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